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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how 40 working-class women participate as volunteers in the service, political, and social action arenas of their community--Carondelet, on the South Side of St. Louis. The purpose is to show that working-class women who live in transitional areas are capable of politically addressing the urban problems intruding into their immediate vicinities and acting as neighborhood caretakers through citizen participation. This hypothesis is in direct contradiction to much existing research which has substantiated the stereotypic view of workingmen's wives as exclusively domestic, oriented toward a traditional sex-role, and apathetic to societal events. Since the mid-1960s, three community voluntary associations have been established in Carondelet--the Family Care Center (privately funded service organization), the Patch Community Center (government funded service and social action) and the Carondelet Community Betterment Federation. Women comprise three-fourths of all volunteers in these agencies and are well represented in elected and non-elected positions. Civil collective actions undertaken by these and similar groups in Carondelet have included battles against the high cost of utility bills, pressure on the city administration to construct floodwalls, prevention of the construction of an unwanted trash incinerator near the municipal park, petitions to the police to increase patrolling on neighborhood streets, and mobilization against neighborhood deterioration. Findings from the interviews with female volunteers in Carondelet indicated that the women enjoyed their civic participation, appreciated the competencies they developed as a result of participation, and appreciated purposeful work outside of the home. Additional research is suggested on the general question of women and the city and, in particular, the communal activities of working class women. (Author/DB)

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WOMEN AS CIVIC VOLUNTEERS IN THE WORKING CLASS COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

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This ethnographic study views how 40 working class women within the context of their residential neighborhood partake in a recently incepted extra-domestic activity: civic voluntarism. The wide-scale input of these particular women into community maintenance is part of an emerging female participatory pattern whereby Middle American women politically address the urban problems intruding into their immediate vicinities. Such communal involvement, along with exposing civic needs, updates our comprehension of workingmen's wives by contradicting stereotypic notions of their domestic exclusivity and apathy to societal events. Sociologically, this study introduces the hypothesis that working-class women, who live in transitional areas, are capable of acting as neighborhood caretakers through citizen participation.

WOMEN AS CIVIC VOLUNTEERS IN THE WORKING CLASS COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary working-class women are joining the ranks of American volunteers. The recent upsurge in grass-roots participation by the so-called "silent majority" has been staunchly supported through the volunteer efforts of working-class women.[1] The communal expansion of workingmen's wives into the civic arena of service, politics, and social action has created an image that exemplifies a new form of social integration and offers added evidence of extra-domestic competency for this minimally educated and traditionally socialized strata of women.

The current generation of working-class women, although not substantially better prepared through formal education or family rearing for the role of community volunteer than their predecessors, face changing social conditions that demand a citizen response. The social order of ethnic enclaves is challenged as urban problems disrupt the "Little Italies", the "Polish Towns", and the "South Sides", weakening family ties, eroding economic self-sufficiency, and often threatening the very existence of such communities. Working-class women now find their families residing in geographical locales with a recognized need for human services. The city planning jargon of gentrification, blockbusting, and red-lining provides applicable explanation for major community dilemmas, but in many cases federal bulldozer razing appears as the alternative to neighborhood preservation.[2]

Working-class women who organize in voluntary collective action can be credited with developing community supports in the drive to

find solutions to an array of social and environmental issues such as housing, crime, and pollution. Included among the diversified range of high priority civic concerns are the needs of women. Today, blue-collar women find themselves more susceptible to the financial necessity of labor force participation, the reality of divorce, and inclusion in the growing number of isolated nuclear families. These life conditions frequently require that day care, continuing adult education, inexpensive medical clinics, and informational resource counseling be added to the list of vital local amenities.[3] Within this context of residential and lifestyle transition, working-class women are becoming "less homebound than previously and more active in the wider world of neighborhood and local community."[4]

A new and impressive civic presence of working-class women is evident in their assertive participatory tactics. As community volunteers in neighborhood organizations, their activities have advanced beyond bake sales and socials. Lobbying, sitting on citizen committies, demonstrating, writing grants, assisting in service-oriented groups, and occasionally appearing on the evening news are typical involvements to this new breed of citizen activists.

Until the last decade, working-class women had a history of minimal participation in voluntary organizations other than church and school affliates. Membership in the League of Women Voters, the Rotary-Anns, the YMCA, the Gray Ladies, and historical preservation groups was middle-class. In fact, a government study in the mid-seventies identified the average volunteer in this country as a middle-class and college-educated woman.[5]

Numerous sociological studies substantiated that working-class women had inconsequential associational memberships. In his classic, Workingman's Wife, Rainwater concluded that the blue-collar woman lacked initiative, assertiveness, and self-confidence, believing that family, husband, and home should come first in her attentions.[6] The Italian West End women in Gans' Urban Villagers primarily belonged to "informal and nameless clubs that were actually peer groups."[7] In Blue-Collar Marriage, Komarovsky found that women residing in the industrial community of Glenton belonged to the church and other organizations such as the PTA, singing societies, bowling groups, or social clubs. Social service was almost non-existent among the organized activities of these women.[8] In the suburb of Levittown, Gans observed a similar differentiation with community groups being the main domain of middle-class women.[9] Hurvitz reported that working-class women who lived in the "tract houses" on Los Angeles' South Bay ranked last out of all groups in citizen participation.[10]

Are these accurate accounts of the continuing lifestyle of the blue-collar woman? The general exodus of working-class women from the home to jobs, as well as the phenomenon of grass-roots civic action in their neighborhoods challenges the conventional wisdom of sociology. For example,

> The working-class woman often works and finds that she can manage both job and home. She is more likely to be active now in the PTA, in volunteer work, and in recreational groups. Her circle of association and friendships has been widening, displacing her earlier tendency to confine social contacts largely through friends.[11]

As working-class women diversify their interests, increased communal involvement on their part, has heightened "maximum feasible

participation" in neighborhoods with traditionally low civic participation. Working-class people generally are becoming more organized and active in urban politics, by articulating their needs for municipal funds and services. The women at this socioeconomic level are often in the forefront of these efforts.

An important example is the National Assembly of Neighborhood Women, a grass-roots organization headquartered in ethnically heterogeneous Brooklyn with affliates in 30 other American cities. The NCNW is demonstrable testimony to the widespread neighborhood involvement of working-class women. After evaluating the impact working-class women are having on major social issues such as day care, housing, mental health, violence in the family, and the delivery of legal and social services, the NCNW acknowledges that the wives of truck drivers, maintenance workers, policemen, and carpenters (who may themselves be clerical, service, blue-collar workers or housewives) are "the unrecognized leaders in our communities."[12]

In the working-class, group affliation is characteristically primary, largely confined to family and peer associations. Women would seem unlikely candidates for community voluntarism, and least of all, leaders. Yet, in consideration of the fact that working-class neighborhoods are often a stronghold of kinship relations, it is not altogether surprising to find wives and mothers among the contingent defending their family-oriented locales from community loss. Suttles suggests that it is actually women, by virtue of their domestic role obligations, who are in an advantageous position to be community caretakers.[13] In territorially-bound urban areas, women are able to establish familiarity and commitment to the quality of

neighborhood living through their steady presence and detailed interaction with local people and facilities. Informal contacts, especially provide an effective means by which women can develop an awareness of neighborhood life, although organizational input is lacking. Prior to the existence of civic associations, bowling leagues, over the fence neighboring klatches, church gatherings, and spontaneous market congregations were some of the main networks through which women transmitted pertinent local information and exchanged opinions occasionally heard by religious leaders but rarely by politicians.

The shift of community maintenance from informal to formal grouping represents a fundamental change in the neighborhood orientation of working-class women. Membership in area betterment federations, block groups, and community service centers requires that these informally predisposed volunteers adhere to the standards of structured organizations. Timetables, ad hoc committees, and bureaucratic considerations become formalities guiding the neighborhood improvement aspirations of women who are now officiators in voluntary grass-roots governance. A nationwide survey conducted to investigate female roles in working-class community organizations, indicates that women, in fact, are represented in the majority among the citizen founders of civic groups, and then comprise nearly half of the lead staffs.[14]

As white ethnic women implement their recent style of formal organizational participation, and establish a publicly recognizable neighborhood role, they incorporate themselves into the varied profile of American volunteers. The type of female volunteer, who joins area

civic associations burgeoning in the working-class quadrants of major American cities, can be typically characterized as high-school educated and the wife of a manual worker. She lives with her family in Middle America, most likely in one of the older industrial cities of the northeast or midwest, perhaps in Southwest Chicago, Northwest Milwaukee, Southwest Detroit, Northeast Rochester, Boston's Charlestown, Cincinnati's South Fairmont, Philadelphia's Kensington, Baltimore's Highland Town, or Cleveland's Broadway Avenue. Here, she resides in a neighborhood which despite its age and bout with urban problems, continues to be personally meaningful. In this area, remain the traces of her family background and ethnic heritage. These ties, and the realization that community conditions affect present family life motivate her to take constructive action through volunteer work. As a member of a neighborhood commonweal organization, she finds collective support for her concerns, and joins the brigade of once "forgotten Americans" who are now pioneering working-class civic consciousness.

On the South Side of St. Louis, the Carondelet area stands out as a particular working-class neighborhood where residents, including many women, have effectively battled the forces of community decline through civic action. This paper focuses on the citizen participation of women in this one city locale, discussing their voluntary activities within the context of their residential community. The sources of data are in-depth interviews conducted with 40 Carondelet women, all of whom are married with a fully functioning household of husband and children. These respondents who were selectively chosen from two neighborhood institutions -- elementary schools and community voluntary organizations -- portray the current variety of role

configurations typical to neighborhood women. Among these women, 20 are active community volunteers (half in this group also hold paid jobs); 10 are extra-domestically involved solely through labor force participation; and 10 are housewives. Through their detailed opinions on citizen participation, perceptions of community life, and personal work histories, these civic group participants, working wives and mothers, and conventional home-bound women provide material for an intensive study of their place in community affairs.

CARONDELET: A CASE STUDY

THE COMMUNITY

The South Side of St. Louis is a collection of working-class neighborhoods, one of which is the predominantly white and ethnically heterogeneous Carondelet located at the southernmost end. Carondelet is more than just a series of streets; it is a well-defined community. Amid a protruding visibility of schools and churches, streets consist of sturdy and closely knit homes with stores, taverns, and little shops situated at the corners of most blocks. The wide range of facilities available to the 14,000 residents characterize this distinct locale as a total community. Within Carondelet's boundaries, there are: 211 businesses including 8 restaurants, 8 bars, 41 factories, 19 churches, 19 voluntary associations, 9 schools, a police station, a library, a bowling alley, a YMCA, a Spanish ethnic club, and a municipal park. In this urban neighborhood, residents can work, attend church, send their children to school, and recreate.

Numerous Carondelet institutions, particularly the educational and religious, are remnants of nineteenth century ethnic enclaves, constructed mainly by German, Irish, and Spanish immigrants. Although

many of the early institutions remain viable, and a three generational residence pattern is common to Carondelet families, ethnicity no longer prevails in regional or personal identity. In present-day Carondelet, residents have ceased to ascribe either their neighborhood or themselves as solidly "German", "Irish", or "Spanish".

Despite the fading bonds of ethnic affliation which were prompted by a post World War II exodus of white ethnics into assimilated St. Louis County suburbs and further instigated by a demolishing highway intrusion in the fifties, Carondelet has maintained status as a stable working-class neighborhood withstanding the repercussions of transition. Poverty and unemployment have been kept at a minimum and even in the midst of invading urban problems this area persists as a settled community comprised of long-term homeowners. On most blocks, one finds self-supporting property holders who have lived at the same address for at least five years.

As a place to live, Carondelet remains a family-centered and neighborhood-focused community satisfying the local population's experiencial expectations of neighborhood life. In a complicated, bureaucratized, and urbanized world, residents here especially value their sense of familiarity with the immediate parochial environment and the feelings of security nearby relatives and strong neighboring ties provide them. Personal integration enhances community ethos as day-to-day living centers in a region that offers the amenities of a small town within a convenient urban setting.

Conscious citizen efforts uphold quality residential standards as the stability of Carondelet is now challenged by the growing presence of social, political, and environmental problems. Poor

streets, a deteriorating business district, more lower income residents, isolated senior citizens, crime, and historical preservation are among pronounced community concerns. Recently, pollution, inter-racial school busing, and the city's proposed development of a $12 million industrial park which has the potential of generating 2,000 jobs while bulldozing approximately 200 homes, have all become issues facing Carondelet residents.

An indigenously organized response to escalating neighborhood problems was initiated in the mid-sixties by the Carondelet Ecumenical Council of Churches when this philanthropic church board realized that community needs had reached a complexity beyond the purview of existing religious, recreational, and school voluntary groups.

During this period, Carondelet's three core community voluntary associations were established: the Family Care Center (FCC), a privately-funded service organization; the Patch Community Center (PCC), government-funded service and social action; and the Carondelet Community Betterment Federation (CCBF), a civic betterment association. These umbrella groups combined with four other service organizations, at least five other social action groups, ward chapters of the Democratic and Republican Parties, a historical society, and ad hoc political school committees form the associational basis for citizen participation in Carondelet.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Carondelet is an organized area where working-class residents have demonstrated their capacity for civic collective action. In this South St. Louis vicinity, people have fought against the high cost of utility bills, pressured the city to construct flood walls, stopped

the building of an unwanted trash incinerator near the municipal park, forced local factories to re-route traffic, prevented the building of an unwanted 24-hour quick shop, led and won a campaign to rezone a section of Carondelet from commercial to residential, petitioned the police department to increase patrolling on certain streets, and convinced the city to tear down dilapadated buildings.

Mobilization against neighborhood deterioration has matured civic-mindedness to the blatant realization that local issues are unquestionably related to the social, economic, and political conditions in the larger St. Louis community. Some residents link the growing number of transients in Carondelet with housing renovation policies in other parts of the city which displace lower income groups forcing them to then relocate in better neighborhoods like their own. They find Carondelet to be competing with other city districts for funds from community block grants under which limited federal monies have been allotted to St. Louis City for neighborhood development purposes. They also perceive a definite relationship between ward political leaders and improvements in their community. In a past election, a group of constituents dissatisfied with the long-standing ward alderman, exercised their citizen rights to the extent of launching a campaign to unseat him.

Conditions shaping the Carondelet community have compelled residents here to contend with the fact that their locality is <u>part</u> of a major metropolitan area. Constructive citizen action, in turn, has singled out Carondelet for official recognition by the City of St. Louis and the State of Missouri. In the main office of the CCBF storefront headquarters, hang the 1976 Mayor's Community

Betterment Award, the 1978 Missouri Betterment Award, and numerous other public citations acclaiming that effective citizen responsibility in this one neighborhood has noticeably contributed to the overall cause of urban betterment.

The successful caretaking of Carondelet rests on the voluntary efforts of local people. Insiders establish neighborhood civic groups; they staff and head these organizations; they execute improvement campaigns.

Extensive citizen input into community grass-roots organizations has cultivated an area reliance on these voluntary groups which now are regarded as integral to neighborhood upkeep. Most Carondelet residents can identify at least one neighborhood civic association, and most probably it is the FCC, PCC, or CCBF, each of which is centrally located in an established site within the community. On a daily basis, a steady stream of local people file in and out of these leading community organizations taking advantage of available services, bringing attention to local problems, articulating their views, and sometimes committing themselves to volunteer work.

Neighborhood projects frequently necessitate area-wide participation drawing the Carondelet community at large into civic activities. Grass-roots organizations reach residents in a variety of ways--arranging town meetings, circulating petitions, organizing lobbying trips, and sponsoring large-scale drives. Carondelet residents vividly recall how their sense of civic duty was activated during a comprehensive housing drive sponsored by the CCBF. Every homeowner was held legally responsible for strict adherence to the city housing code. Since community groups strongly support the notion

that civic maintenance begins at home, proper care of personal property continues to be an often utilized strategy for area improvement.

Citizen participation is furthermore encouraged via the three local newspapers distributed in Carondelet. The South Side Journal, Neighborhood Link News, and the Carondelet Betterment Federation Newsletter generally acquaint residents with neighborhood specific events, issues, and organizational activities and from time to time carry soliciting ads for local organizations.

Limited community involvement through individual monitoring is facilitated by the Carondelet Community Directory. Found in the kitchens of most families, this listing provides appropriate numbers to call when filing complaints on such problems as air pollution, street maintenance, traffic control, and sanitation.

In Carondelet, community organizations are highly visible and easily accessible, perhaps a phone call away or a two block walk, but in many instances, initial contact is made through a representative neighbor, who more than likely is a woman.

WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY

I. HISTORY

It is women who comprise three-fourths of all volunteers, and hold half the leadership positions in Carondelet community organizations.[15] For their obvious citizen participation, women are appropriately recognized as the prime caretakers of the area. In fact, at the 1977 Annual Who Is Doing What In Carondelet, a CCHF sponsored dinner-social organized for the expressed purpose of having civic organizations present progress reports, the following verbal

tribute was bestowed to community women, acknowledging them as the backbone of area voluntarism:

> The organizations in Carondelet are what keep this community going. And the organizations are mostly made of women. They do everything from filling envelopes to staffing day care centers to heading committees. Without them, our Carondelet wouldn't be what it is. The women are largely responsible for maintaining the well-being of this community.

Along with "sitting on boards", "staffing day care centers", and "sealing envelopes", the history of Carondelet women's citizen participation reveals that in the past they have lobbied, gone to court to testify on social issues such as discrimination, established a Montessori school, written newspaper editorials, and attended workshops pertaining to the ERA. They have even demonstrated against the development of a low-income housing project. Perhaps the most dramatic example is the case of local women who organized an anti-pollution campaign touring area factories and distributing "Worst Polluter of the Year" awards. This event received televised media coverage.

As volunteers whose activities entail partaking in confrontation tactics, cooperative political bargaining, and self-help programs, Carondelet women are instituting a new type of female volunteer role in their community. A generation ago, women in this working-class neighborhood volunteered almost exclusively in the churches and schools since these were the only kinds of voluntary associations available to them. With a wider range of voluntary groups in Carondelet today, women find that they are no longer restricted to the sodalities and PTA's like their mothers. There are a variety of well-known organizations one can join. There are causes around which to rally.

As a matter of fact, the popular choice of community voluntary groups by young and middle-aged women has produced a significant decline in church group membership, almost to the point of phasing out this traditional avenue of extra-domestic participation. It is steadily becoming the norm for married women who are in the prime years of adult life to opt for community group voluntarism. Widows and retired women comprise the last leg of membership in church groups.[16] Oftentimes, the churches themselves recruit volunteers for community organizations through Sunday pulpit announcements and printed circulars.

II. ACTIVITIES

Neighborhood women who join community groups can relate to their localized orientation which places focus on area issues and family values. For instance, the neighborhood association deals to a large extent with property interests. Social action groups most often fight against "progressive" innovations such as highways which threaten the existence of established neighborhoods. Service groups subscribe to a "human" philosophy responding to the needs of people, especially children.

A woman who enters the voluntary group circuit in Carondelet can expect a support system of fellow neighborhood women. The civic groups here are not male-dominated. In the respective community organizations, women hold elected offices as presidents, vice-presidents, secretary-treasurers, chairpersons, coordinators, etc. Even in non-elected positions, they merit titles as "tutors", "staff assistants", and "editors of newsletters". The volunteering women, however, emphasize that office-holding in the groups to which they

belong is just a matter of formality since community work to a large extent is sustained by an informal network of telephone calling and home meetings.

The women who volunteer claim to be motivated by an altruistic desire to "help" their community. The jobs they perform as volunteers unquestionably aid the general welfare of the area. In the political arena, they are community spokespersons. By volunteering in the day care centers, neighborhood medical clinic, and senior citizen groups, women meet social work needs. As members of the historical society, they contribute to the physical and cultural preservation of the area. In the schools, women's staff assistance improves education, reduces tax dollars, and monitors institutional policies such as busing and bond issues which affect the larger community. As volunteers in the citizen patrol squad, they play an active role in crime reduction. In the betterment association, women are organizational administrators synchronizing civic activities in order that life in their residential area coincides with the official community motto: "Carondelet: A Good Place for Family Living--Schools, Homes, and Churches".

Women have learned that the resolution of headline issues alone does not make Carondelet a better place to live. Smaller scale community problems relevant to everyday life are also important considerations. With backing from their respective organizations, volunteers push the city to tear down blighted buildings, remind the street division to remove obstructing trees and trash containers, contact police when public property is vandalized, and petition for the installation of more street signs and mailboxes.

III. THE WOMEN WHO VOLUNTEER

In dealing with the wide scope of neighborhood problems, Carondelet women have proven themselves to be enlightened citizens capable of influencing political decisions through collective group effort. As they step outside of their homes into the offices of city hall, these working-class women, in the process of responding to civic issues, make a statement about themselves. They show that their interests range beyond husbands and children. They demonstrate that they can competently handle extra-domestic jobs. And with their entry into the community, these South Side inhabitants take their place in the diversified profile of newsmaking American women, if only in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

As Carondelet women remove themselves from the confines of a home-centered existence, paradoxically, it is their domesticity which leads them into community volunteer work. Regardless of personal interests and extra-familial activities, these working-class women identify themselves primarily as wives and mothers. Since they live neighborhood-based lives through their husbands, children, and extended kin, community conditions affect them in a very personal way, making civic group participation almost an extension of familial roles.

Many women are naturally drawn into the community through their children. Mothers of school-age children are eligible automatically for participation in parent-affiliated voluntary groups. As they join school groups, these women gradually become introduced to other groups, eventually community organizations.

Civic leaders can remember attending their first Mothers' Group meeting. Because "the name was not forgotten", in time, their

volunteer work escalated into the community. Other women directly join community organizations out of their own initiative, sometimes spurred by the presence of a particular problem that disrupts home life. Active family and friends can also introduce a woman to community activism.

However these women become recruited into civic groups, once they assume responsibility, they find that their personal lifestyles are rather conducive to the pursuit of volunteer work. Housewives and even working mothers who typically hold part-time jobs have the time to attend day meetings and the scheduling flexibility to fit occasional erratic volunteer work appointments into their daily routines.

Employed women volunteer a few less hours than women who stay at home but usually paid jobs are considered to facilitate volunteer work. Paid workers name concrete job skills they transfer from their clerical, service, and blue-collar jobs to volunteer tasks, for example: bookkeeping, typing, telephone work, accounting, handlettering, driving ability, knowledge of first aid, and work-organizing techniques. Labor force participants also credit their jobs for enhancing both their verbal and social skills. Women who are exposed to a workgroup find that they are better able to express themselves in terms of voicing opinions, addressing groups, and generally conversing with the public. Where the social dynamics of group involvement are concerned, employed women find themselves accustomed to meeting, relating, and working with people.

Some women bring a previously acquired battery of skills to community groups. Others develop competencies as they participate. But all volunteers are required to function in a time and place

situation. While women may have more free time structured into their lives to accomodate organizations, their familial obligations take precedence. Volunteer work can even pose as a competing activity to husbands and children. At times, these women upset their husbands and disorganize their children as they fulfill the expectations set by an outside civic group. But there are volunteers, especially those with a considerable history of community involvement and women dually active in paid and civic work, who are proud of their supportive spouses. Their husbands have learned to cocperate with children in the household division of labor when supper is late or other such domestic duties cannot be performed by the woman of the house who happens to be attending a meeting in the community. The lack of team work among family members can be reason enough to forgo joining a voluntary group.

Married women in Carondelet, who were reared in a class background espousing a traditional sex-role orientation, have set the precedent for female citizen participation. By no stretch of the imagination are these women pacesetting liberationists, but, at the same time, a growing number are discontent to be "just housewives". Volunteer work provides them with the opportunity to add a broader spectrum to their lives.

Housewives who volunteer break out of their isolation which recently has been intensified by the day-time absence of their working neighbors. Women whose lives were devoted exclusively to husband and children now engage in a self-chosen work experience but without the constraints of a rigid time schedule. For employed women, paid work and volunteer work are frequently perceived as integrated activities.

Just as job skills are applicable to volunteer work, community involvement compensates for boredom, repetitiousness, lack of challenge, and other negative aspects of low-status jobs. Unemployed women accustomed to purposeful work outside of the home seek a job substitute through volunteer work. In most cases, this intermittent activity evolves into an ongoing interest.

A community role renders personal benefits. Civic participation enhances the lives of these working-class women as a welcomed diversion, a social integrator, and a source of personal fulfillment. Furthermore, it provides them with the opportunity to actualize their belief that women are equally as capable as men to be good leaders in politics.

IV. THE COMMUNITY AS A PLACE TO VOLUNTEER

The citizen participation of Carondelet women is facilitated by the presence of community groups in their own residential neighborhood. On a practical level, the greatest advantage to area-based organizations is the relative absence of transportation problems. Because Carondelet is a spatially concentrated locale, there is little difficulty in gaining geographical access to the civic groups. Many women live within walking distance of the community associations and schools. While city hall in downtown St. Louis is only fifteen minutes away, most times women have to travel no further than the library or parish hall to attend a meeting or a conference with public officials. On their home territory, Carondelet women have hosted numerous high-ranking political personalities, among them, the Mayor, the District Congressman, and representatives of the federal government.

Volunteer efforts taking place within the context of the community have tangible local ramifications. The obvious neighborhood

problems addressed by civic groups culminate in policies and services meeting immediate needs of area people. Activists find their voluntarism aids relatives, friends, the family next door, and even themselves.

Neighborhood groups are designed by residents for local use. The welcoming sign on the door of the FCC is a simple message which explicitly communicates the overall thrust of grass-roots organizations: "NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS". A working-class woman who volunteers in Carondelet is not overwhelmed by abstract causes defined by cosmopolitan agencies. Instead, her volunteer work filters back concretely into the residential commonwealth.

Although women's civic action has ostensibly improved the community, some of the assertive tactics used to promote betterment are viewed with a note of intrigue by the world outside of Carondelet. The current generation of women who direct sizeable communal projects, enter into debate with the governing bureaucracy, and carry picket signs distort the socially passive female image conveyed by their house-bound mothers and foreign-speaking immigrant grandmothers.

As these women innovate their lives through civic interests, their behavior, nonetheless, falls into conformity with the community. They belong to mainline organizations respected by the residents and approved by the church. Furthermore, their efforts tend to be perceived as more nurturant than political since community groups through their social action ultimately respond to human needs. Each year women share in the public recognition given to citizen participation when their voluntary activities culminate in the sponsorship of Carondelet Days, a community-wide festival held in the municipal park.

V. THE FUTURE

In Carondelet, civic associations are establishing themselves as central community organizations. At the same time, churches are receding as avenues for voluntary group participation. The parish priest, the ward politician and other traditional intermediary agents can no longer solve escalating community problems. More and more, informal networks are weakening through the dissolution of extended families and female entry into the labor force. Women, in particular, are turning actively to civic groups both for a workable solution to modern communal dilemmas and a sustenance of social contact. Their personal efficacy allows them to skillfully take charge of organizational directives. In the past decade, they have risen in the voluntary group hierarchy. In their advancement, they have moved from the sphere of segregated church groups and matriarchal school organizations to positions of community leadership.

Carondelet women view their civic energies as a worthwhile investment. Many plan to spend the remainder of their lives in the neighborhood where they were born and in which they have already lived out a large portion of their adult years. Although they are not naive to the pervasive trend of geographical mobility, ideally, these women want their sons and daughters to also settle in the community. They would like to reside close to their grandchildren.

These working-class women have seen their community change in the past. They know the future will inevitably bring added transition. Their forecast for the Carondelet of tomorrow, however, is based on a philosophy of preservation rather than innovation. Above all, they speculate the retention of neighborhood living.

According to their predictions, Carondelet will survive as a total community neither transforming into a transient city neighborhood nor a suburb. The known area institutions will remain by banning shopping malls, high rise office buildings, industrial parks, and apartment complexes. Hopefully, more of the following will be introduced into the community--young families, single occupant homes, locally employed residents, and revived businesses. Safe streets, pollution controls, neighborhood schools, presentable homes, historic landmarks, and recreational tracts will continue as ongoing projects.

The current progress of civic betterment nourishes future goals. Residents realize that it is within their power to reasonably guide the direction of community change. They have managed to steer a potentially declining neighborhood into the path of revitalization. As the quest for neighborhood stability extends into the future, Carondelet women should anticipate a challenging role in citizen participation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In order to incorporate women into urban paradigms in sociology, much future research needs to focus on the general question of women and the city, and, in particular, the communal activities of working-class women. This descriptive analysis of female-represented community action viewed within the entirety of a single neighborhood explicitly illustrates that working-class women are full-fledged participants in the politics of urban life. As contemporary women mold a social presence for themselves, working-class women, induced by environmental conditions, have found a role expansion option in civic volunteer work. To apply traditional stereotypes depicting personal passivity

and worldly ineptitude is now a misrepresentation of these women who, on the merit of their own efforts, have gained entry into the adult community. In the process of seeking an integration of self, family, and neighborhood through citizen participation, they no longer make their contribution to society only as "workingmen's wives."

FOOTNOTES

1. Kathleen McCourt, Working-Class Women and Grass-Roots Politics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

2. Nancy Seifer, Absent From The Majority: Working-Class Women in America (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1973), pp. 19-22.

3. Pamela Roby, The Conditions of Women in Blue Collar, Industrial and Service Jobs: A Review of Research and Proposals for Research, Action, and Policy (Washington: Women's Bureau, 1974), pp. 59-61, and Ruth Sidel, Urban Survival: The World of Working-Class Women (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 171.

4. Social Research, Inc., A Study of Working-Class Women in a Changing World (Chicago: Social Research, Inc., 1973), p. 9.

5. Action, Americans Volunteer: 1974 Statistical Study of Volunteers in the U.S. (Washington: Action, 1975), p. 3.

6. Rainwater, Lee, Richard P. Coleman, and Gerald Handel, Workingman's Wife: Her Personality, World and Life Style (New York: McFadden Books, 1959), p. 68.

7. Herbert J. Gans, The Urban Villagers (New York: Free Press, 1962), p. 108.

8. Mirra Komarovsky, Blue-Collar Marriage (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 323-24.

9. Herbert J. Gans, The Levittowners (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), p. 61.

10. Nathan Hurvitz, "Marital Strain in the Blue-Collar Family," in Blue-Collar World, ed. Arthur B. Shostak and William Gomberg (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), pp. 92-109.

11. Social Science, Inc., op. cit., pp. 9-10.

12. Susan K. Malone and Pat Ciccone, National Congress of Neighborhood Women Information Brochure (Brooklyn: NCNW Publication, 1979), p. 1.

13. Gerald D. Suttles, The Social Construction of Communities (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 40.

14. Wendy R. Sherman and Barbara Spence, Women in Neighborhoods, unpublished manuscript prepared for the "Neighborhood Women Putting It Together" Conference sponsored by the National Congress of Neighborhood Women in cooperation with the Office of Neighborhood Development, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1979, p. 16.

15. These statistics are based on a questionnaire which I mailed to the 19 community organizations officially listed in the Carondelet Directory and the 9 neighborhood schools in order to obtain information on their structural set-up. The respective voluntary organizations and schools were asked to record the number of volunteers in their organization, to specify the number of male and female volunteers, and to indicate how many of the female volunteers were also employed in the labor force. Of the 19 organizations, 11 responded and 8 of the 9 schools cooperated.

16. This current trend was cited during an interview with a Carondelet minister who is active on an area ecumenical church board which coordinates religious voluntary organizations.